



STATEMENT OF  
JACQUELINE J. BYERS  
DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH  
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERALISM AND THE CENSUS

ON BEHALF OF THE  
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

April 19, 2005  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Chairman Turner, Ranking Member Clay, and members of the Subcommittee on Federalism and the Census.

My name is Jacqueline Byers. I am the Director of Research at the National Association of Counties. The National Association of Counties is the only national organization that represents county governments in the United States. From its headquarters on Capitol Hill, NACo is a full service organization that provides legislative advocacy, research, financial products and services, and technical assistance to member counties across the country.

Thank you for the invitation to testify on the importance of the Census to county governments. As old line Census Bureau folks say, “the 2010 Census will be my fourth census” and I am pleased to share with you what I have learned about its use by county officials throughout the nation. I also want to express my appreciation for these hearings and the opportunity for stakeholders like NACo to express their opinion.

I am here today to talk about the importance of Census activities to county governments. These activities currently include the American Community Survey, the MAF/Tiger File preparation and the 2010 short form census plans.

Every county in the country uses census data everyday. It is the only controlled and reliable population baseline and demographic data available on a national basis. This data is used to plan school classrooms, curriculum and the number of teachers. It is used to construct roads, bridges, and major highways. It is used to attract businesses and economic development. It is used to plan programs for people with special needs, to develop daycare centers, to build libraries and stock them. It is used to determine the housing stock and value in each community and what is needed to address the growing population. It is used to determine how long it takes for residents to get to their jobs, where they are going to work and how much money they make. All of this information is necessary for a county to plan effectively for the future.

In addition to the local use of this information, use of it by federal entitlement programs and in allocation formulas for federal funds is equally important. Most local governments receive federal funds. In 2003, federal

grant funds and other direct payments to state and county governments equaled nearly \$900 billion. Since county governments are the level of government closest to the people and are charged with direct service delivery in many areas, it is vitally important that data that is used to allocate federal funds that help fund this service delivery system is current and correct.

There are three points I would like to make today.

The first is NACo's continuing support of the American Community Survey. We would like to express our thanks to Congress for seeing that this vital program was properly funded in the current budget. The American Community Survey will provide the most current demographic data possible to all counties. This data will be much more current than the previous census data, which by the end of each decade was sorely outdated, but in some cases, still the best information around. The demographics of our counties are changing constantly. In order to find out who we are and what we are becoming and to plan for these changes, nothing the government has ever produced will work as well as the ACS data. The biggest task involved in the complete implementation of the ACS is education and outreach. This means educating the public so that they will respond to this new kind of survey, and educating local officials so that they know of its availability and value.

One activity that the Census Bureau takes seriously is outreach. The recently published handbook for State and Local Officials on the ACS does an excellent job of presenting the how, why and when of this new survey. It also explains why each question is asked, citing either federal legislation, administrative regulation or court decision. I clearly remember being asked to brief congressional staff during the last census because they were receiving so many inquiries about the reasons for including certain questions on the 2000 Census. An early educational process and outreach should improve awareness.

The second point is the importance of the Master Address File and Tiger programs. The only way any of these census programs can work is to have good, clear geographic information. As a former member of the Decennial Census Advisory Committee I frequently voiced how important it is to constantly update the MAF. As counties across the nation experienced phenomenal growth during the 1990s that has continued into this decade,

capturing the new address and map information is a continuous process, not one that can be completed in the 18 months prior to census day. As TIGER has been developed, it has become a vital tool to connect individual addresses to geographic entities such as roads, rivers and legal boundaries. Continuous support and funding of both of these programs throughout the decades between censuses is important in order to maintain accurate files. With the expansion of the ACS the continuing update and resulting improved accuracy is more important than ever.

The third point I would like to speak to is the 2010 short form census. NACo has supported the ACS not only because it provides much more current demographic data about counties throughout the decade, but also because it created the possibility of an all short form census. As you know, in the past, approximately 16 percent of all households, or about 1 out of 7, received the long form census. One of the difficulties in getting these forms returned was the length of the form and the information requested. By no longer having the long form that excuse for non-response no longer exists.

However, it is important to realize that outreach and education about the why you should respond to the census is still just as vital as it was for the 2000 census when historic outreach efforts were conducted. As the demographics of our nation are changing, educating the newcomers, and some naysayers too, about why response is necessary will be just as important in 2010 as it has been in the past. The partnership activities and the mobilization of stakeholder organizations that was accomplished for 2000 need to be replicated for 2010. Even though excellent progress was made in getting to the hard to count populations in 2000, more needs to be done. The very people who are often missed in a census are the most likely to require services from county governments. People who need additional education, additional affordable housing, additional healthcare and other social services are likely to fail to respond. Some of these hard to count people are new to this country and come from environments where you do not fill out personal information about yourself and send it back to the government. Partnerships with the people who are gatekeepers to these communities and can reach out to the hard to count and the undercounted will go a long way to creating the confidence people need to complete their census forms. Funding and support for the partnership activities, including involvement of stakeholder groups, schools and local, state and national level organizations, continue to be a necessary part of preparing for the 2010 census. NACo recognizes that no other organization in the United States can

do the massive job of counting our people and finding out where they live and who they are. We strongly urge that the Census Bureau receives the appropriate allocations so that they can do what they do best.

That concludes my testimony. I thank you for the opportunity to discuss this important issue and look forward to any questions that you and other members of the committee may have.